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## **CTS and normativity: The essentials of preemptive counter-terrorism interventions**

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## **CTS and normativity: The essentials of preemptive counter-terrorism interventions**

### **Abstract**

This article critically assesses calls for ‘normativity’ in counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism, and suggests that aligning with hegemonic narratives about securing the ‘pre-crime’ space is problematic in a context of emancipation. Utilising interviews with a number of Prevent officials (including Channel ‘de-radicalisation’ mentors), the paper argues that when any counter-radicalization regime is implemented, two traits are necessarily inherent: identity construction, and ‘concerned concern’, both of which are based on subjective speculation about an individual’s future intent. Identity construction in preemptive counter-terrorism works through prejudiced human imagination in order to normalise perceived and ‘risky’ divergence, but which is mired in contradictions precisely because practitioners interpret risk (and therefore divergence) differently. Concerned concern is a paradoxical constitution both of *support for* and *protection against* individuals. Ultimately, in exploring these two concepts, the paper critically engages with the notion that Prevent is ‘just another safeguarding duty’. Building on earlier critical terrorism scholarship, this discussion shows how worst case logics apparent in national discourse are largely absent at the point of implementation, yet pejorative identity-construction and some suspicion (no matter how banalised) are implicit in any risk-managing scheme in a counter-terrorism context. These qualities are incompatible with an emancipatory agenda.

### **Keywords**

Counter-radicalisation, Channel, de-radicalisation, radicalisation, safeguarding

## Introduction

The Prevent programme, the British ‘pre-crime’ security project that seeks to stop people supporting or becoming involved in terrorism, has been mired by claims of racial profiling and promoting divisiveness, and that it could end up “promoting extremism” (UN 2016). Its centrepiece and intervention arm, Channel, provides mentorship for those said to be most risky/at-risk of moving into criminality, and is looked to by other countries as exemplary practice (Thornton and Bouhana 2017). In the context of a Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) call for normativity, this piece critically assesses the implementation of Prevent as a project that promises counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism success (Baldet 2017). The criticism this paper provides is particularly appropriate given that “Prevent’s a project that’s... as good as the people inputting into it” (Interviewee 1, Channel mentor). After setting out the theoretical and empirical contribution this article provides, the discussion turns briefly to how counter-radicalisation referrals in Britain are administered. Following this, and utilising interviews with officials at the heart of Prevent and Channel, the paper suggests that two first principles are necessary for any preemptive counter-terrorism programme. The opening substantive section demonstrates the first of these two principles: the necessity of a *subjective identity-fixing mechanism*, which leads to varying identifications of risk being performed. The following section examines the second principle: the integral role of *suspicion* of subjects’ motives, emphasising how suspicion is often concealed through the rhetoric of ‘safeguarding’. The third section looks at reforms that would attempt to overcome these two first principles, suggesting their inevitable failure. The article concludes that before CTS adopts a ‘normative’ approach that seeks to improve or work with a preemptive counter-terrorism regime, it should first understand the necessary ingredients of such a regime’s implementation.

The paper indicates that the fixing of identities along the grounds of ‘possible risk’ is a function premised on conceptions of the ‘Other’ (Said 1979) and a desire to prevent possible future deviance occurring, and which necessarily works through a lack of knowledge, human prejudice and imagination (Lowe 2017). Despite the wishes of practitioners, this will always lead to varied interpretation of what constitutes a security risk. In conjunction with the subjectivity of imagining security risks, outlined in the second section is an exposition on how suspicion is administered through ‘concerned concern’. Concerned concern is posited as necessary trait of security preemption with a dual utility: it sees subjects both as vulnerable *and* as posing riskiness, as individuals in need of support themselves *and* whom society needs protecting from. In contrast, other areas of safeguarding focus only on the vulnerability of subjects (with the exception of gang-related safeguarding, discussed later).

Working to identify where risk may exist within subjects as their ultimate goal, preemptive counter-terrorism regimes *cannot* escape their reliance upon the intensely subjective separation of ‘good’ (behaviour and perspectives) from ‘bad’, and of suspicion of the Other. Throughout the paper these two themes will be shown as central to any preemptive security regime: regardless of how often the Prevent Strategy is framed as ‘just another safeguarding tool’ which is “substantially comparable to safeguarding in other areas, including child abuse or domestic violence” (HM Government 2011, 84), the strategy cannot escape these first principles. Ultimately it suggests that instead of these principles being irksome imperfections that can be ironed out, any scheme that acts on pre-intention subjects will only embolden the culture of violence thesis by placing pejorative labels on specific communities and individuals, and will embed suspicion in society. The paper therefore suggests that the ‘logic’ of preemptive counter-terrorism (and counter-extremism) should not be considered in the context of emancipation.

As well as developing the relative empirical vacuum on Channel (Thornton and Bouhana 2017), this piece theorises about the ‘first principles’ of the implementation of counter-terrorism, following Jackson’s 2015 work in this journal, that exposed the structural requirements of any preemptive programme. He identifies four core characteristics:

- 1) rejection of previous terrorism (or any) knowledge,
- 2) governing the future through the unknown,
- 3) the prioritisation and institutionalisation of imagination to identify threats, and
- 4) the “acceptance of a permanent ontological condition of ‘waiting for terror’” (2015, 35).

Whilst preemptive counter-terrorism regimes are held up along these lines at the *structural* level, this article supplements Jackson’s thesis by identifying two traits as a necessary minimum at the *implementation* stage of preemptive counter-terrorism: prejudiced identity-fixing (prescribing arbitrary and imagined subjectivities on individuals) and ‘concerned concern’, or ‘diluted suspicion’ (about an individual’s possible deviant trajectory). Although there is obvious crossover between these two traits and the four suggested by Jackson, this discussion argues that practitioners assume significantly different roles within the structure in contrast to the logic *underpinning* the structure, so much so that epistemological internal conflict is common and visceral. This distinction between structural justifications and practitioner implementation is highlighted by Martin (2014), who writes that community-level work in the ‘pre-crime’ space can be considered “preemption”, where the more targeted, individual-level Channel work can be understood as “precaution”. Yet, whilst this distinction may be true at a discursive and structural level, thresholds for intervention are so low that the work of Channel should hardly be considered precautionary. As another example, although Jackson (2015) writes that the programme of Prevent is justified on the grounds of ‘waiting for terror’, practitioners interviewed rarely narrated their role as related to preventing terrorism;

instead, their roles were explained as safeguarding practitioners largely unrelated to security-bound risk-management. The logic of a preemptive counter-terrorism regime, at the administrative level, therefore needs exposing to see how far structural narratives are explicitly carried over, which allows for theorisation as to the essential mechanisms for a preemptive project to be undertaken. With the narrative being propagated and widely accepted (Busher et al. 2017) that Prevent is like any other safeguarding responsibility, the implementation stage is particularly important to excavate.

The piece is informed by work produced by CTS scholars (for example: Heath-Kelly 2017; Heath-Kelly et al. 2014; Jarvis 2009; Jarvis and Lister 2013; Martin 2014, 2018) and critical risk society scholars (for example: Amoore 2013; Ericson and Haggerty 1997; Ewald 1991), who have sought to deconstruct hegemonic knowledge around ‘terrorism’ and approaches towards governing possible future subjectivities. A range of other academic work into the operation of Channel and Prevent was influential (Elshimi 2017; de Weert and Eijkman 2018; Thornton and Bouhana 2017; Weeks 2017,2018; Spalek and Davies 2012). More fundamentally, this article is informed by Foucauldian conceptions of identity construction through discourse, research on Othering through space and identity construction (Springer 2009, 2015; Massey 2005; Sian 2017), and the social production of terrorism ‘knowledge’ (Hülse and Spencer 2008; Stampnitzky 2013; Jackson 2015). It follows Jarvis’ claim that calls for normativity only serve to legitimise internal and hegemonic assumptions about truth-producing regimes: “Trading truths about terrorism... is critical only up to a point” (Jarvis, 2009: 21).

This article was informed by semi-structured interviews with 18 Prevent-related practitioners interviewed between September 2017 and September 2018, including 6 Channel mentors (out of 60-70 nationally). Others interviewed were (former and present) Regional Prevent Coordinators, Prevent Coordinators, local authority actors with responsibility for

Prevent, and two individuals delivering training funded by Prevent. Several interviewees also deliver official Prevent *Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent* ('WRAP') training, one session of which was attended by the author. (Training session provided by Interviewee 5, a Prevent Coordinator).

### **Functioning of Prevent**

Prevent was established as one of the four strands of a broader counter-terrorism strategy (called CONTEST) in Britain in 2003, which, in its earlier years, focused on fostering 'community cohesion'. Muslim populations were targeted with specific funding from the Prevent budget (DCLG 2007) in order to encourage integration into Britain, but as Prevent was located within a counter-terrorism scheme, its links with a security agenda did not go unnoticed (Thomas 2009). However, Prevent has since been decoupled from community cohesion work after being passed to the Home Office. Following the 7/7 attacks, the Prevent programme was made public, and it has since faced two significant amendments: in 2011 'non-violent extremism' was assimilated into its remit, and in 2015 the Prevent Duty bestowed public sector workers with responsibility for spotting and reporting supposed 'signs of radicalisation'. Channel was piloted in 2007 as the individual-intervention arm focussing on the most supposedly risky referrals made to Prevent, expanded over the following few years and rolled out nationally in 2012. The Extreme Risk Guidance (ERG) factors are 22 supposed 'signs of radicalisation' taken from studies of 'extremist-related' convicts, and which include "need for status [and] 'them' and 'us' thinking" apparently as showing an individual may be moving towards risky behaviour (NOMS 2014, 3-4, restricted; also reported publicly in CAGE 2016). Needless to say, the ERG are not objective metrics of 'risk' and were developed as "essentially working hypotheses" (NOMS 2014, 5). Moreover, Furneaux (2018, 39-40) writes that these metrics were from a study "originally devised to be used as a reoffending risk assessment in



prisons”, yet they were imposed into Prevent because the study was the only framework available when developing the ‘pre-crime’ policy. The science behind these signs has been seriously contested by practitioners and academics (including: Royal College of Psychiatrists 2016; Knudsen 2018), not least for encouraging the reporting of a wide range of banal behaviours. Referrals are able to be made by any citizen in the country, but a large proportion are made through the education system (HM Government 2017, 2018). The ‘most risky’ Prevent referrals make their way up to local Channel panels (staffed primarily by local safeguarding leads), and the ‘most concerning’ of these - 300-400 per year (HM Government 2017, 2018) - are offered Channel mentorship with one of the 60-70 Home Office-approved mentors (Interviewee 15, National Prevent Lead) until they are deemed ‘safe’ by the mentor and Channel panel. The article now turns to the substantive sections.

### **Identity-fixing (of the Other) through ambiguity and subjectivity**

Central to the idea of counter-radicalisation is the management of supposed future risk. This rationale is intimately concerned with identifying the carriers of the possible development of malevolent intentions, in order for them to be intervened upon and the alleged risk negotiated. The identification or “visibilisation” (Martin 2018) of supposed spaces of risk is therefore fundamental to managing that ‘risk’, and the fixing of subjects on the basis of their possible propensity to develop some destructive subjectivity, is essential in order for them to be filtered and sorted according to their ‘likelihood of posing risk’. As indicated by Jackson (2015) the role of categorising risk is essential at a structural level. This section looks at the centrality during the local level of implementation of human prejudice behind identity-fixing (or ‘risk-imagining’), and how distinctions of ‘us’ from ‘them’ - distinctions that Prevent supposedly attempts to combat - are outworked through the very implementation of Prevent.

Working on an unknown future, in trying to stop people who haven't demonstrated violent tendencies from becoming violent, highlights a number of problems, primarily that this space is plagued with ambiguity both conceptually and practically, which leads to the prioritisation of *risk-imagining* in this field of security, and a broad net being cast (Jackson 2012, 2015). As Heath-Kelly (2017) writes, subjects become constituted by their destructive capacity, but simultaneously positioned as possible allies. This dual construction is symptomatic of working on the future in the present; both friend and foe are possible future subjectivities, but in order for 'risk' to be minimised potentially destructive subjectivities must be acted upon *now*. Importantly those deemed non-risky remain only ever *principally* in the non-risky space; they - along with society at large - are liable to their subjectivity being swiftly re-narrated as risky (Walker 2008). Because different possibilities are being explored in the attempt to 'determine risk' through the Channel process (i.e. 'does this individual pose a threat or not?'), future risk is constantly being imagined (de Goede 2008; McCulloch and Wilson 2016). The reliance upon risk-imagining is central to any programme that works to prevent violence. The infamy of Guy Fawkes relies on imagining his propensity to commit violence, because ultimately he may not have gone on to execute his plot. Obviously, this instance does not require a creative imagination to conceive of the risk he could have posed: he *had* placed gunpowder under Parliament. Imagination becomes more central when attempting the preemption of violence where no preparation has occurred but where possible and dangerous-sounding divergence is perceived to exist. In short, governing possible future intent leads to varied interpretations and necessary contradictions between practitioners, because it relies on imagining risk. This was entirely apparent in all of the interviews, as we will see.

The difficulty of identifying the future in the present means that any 'working definitions' must cast a wide net, and then rely upon practitioner judgment in the implementation stage. The Prevent Strategy explicitly notes that definitions that it provides

“relate to Prevent and are not always authoritative in any wider context” (HM Government 2011, 107), inferring that indeed, its assumptions do not exist in some objective reality. But regardless of its position in wider research, even on its own self-fulfilling logic, ambiguity reigns. The Strategy takes extremism as the “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs” (HM Government 2011, 107). Yet several practitioners implementing the policy took issue with different elements of this definition, suggesting some (especially ‘British values’ and ‘tolerance of different faiths’) were contradictory or not relevant. One Channel mentor (Interviewee 8) observed,

So if someone says ‘well actually I don’t believe in gay marriage’ is that homophobic and does it fall foul of British, universal values of tolerance and respect and diversity et cetera? So there has to be consistency. There are Christians and Jews and Muslims, traditional faiths, who hold a very traditional idea of what marriage should look like. And are they all viewed as extremists because of that? I don’t agree with that... So there is some conflict.

The ERG principles underpinning Prevent are distinctly vague and encourage wide interpretations: “excitement, comradeship and adventure”, “them and us thinking” and “presence of mental illness or personality disorder” are said to be signs of radicalisation (NOMS 2014; CAGE 2016). One senior official (Interviewee 7, Regional Prevent Coordinator) commented that “The ERG22 plus... it’s 22-and-a-bit factors, very subjective, not a checklist, [it’s] a very subjective document.” The document is open to interpretation precisely because it *must* be. As the architect of Prevent Professor Sir David Omand (Interviewee 12) mentioned, the academic debate around why violence occurs is still not settled - and likely never will, given how risk can be interpreted so differently. Without this debate being settled, intuition will be central to the process of risk-imagining and construction. Because ‘risk’ looks different to

everyone, and because the *causes* of violence are impossible to determine, signs of risk that are present only in those who would go on to be engaged in violence *cannot be taught or written down because they exist only in the imaginary space*. This was particularly evident in a discrepancy between two practitioners' understanding of risk. One local authority safeguarding lead with responsibility for Prevent (Interviewee 4) noted that "a bad Prevent [practice] would be no response. Someone comes in and says 'pray for Palestine' in a school classroom and nobody responds to that. That's a bad... That's misconduct in my opinion." When this was put to another official (Interviewee 7, Regional Prevent Coordinator) they contested this view, saying, "It's quite wrong to pick [that example] out of a list of items and say 'that is a problem'." Internal discrepancies were common, exactly because it is necessary that ambiguity and different interpretations play a central part in any preemptive 'risk-managing' programme.

The definitional vagueness, because Prevent's *modus operandi* is speculating about others' possible future intent based on very indirect data, leads to practitioners mixing metaphors. During an interview, one senior Prevent official commented, "So that's what success is for us: disengagement from violent extremism" (Interviewee 7, Regional Prevent Coordinator). Similarly, another mentioned Channel mentoring would be offered "if there is an individual who needs to be disengaged from terrorism or de-radicalised so to speak" (Interviewee 15, national Prevent lead). 'Disengagement' has historically been associated with a physical movement away often from gangs or insurgencies, and 'violent extremism' and 'terrorism' indicate some level of violence having taken place. But a number of practitioners explained that many Channel cases had never even mentioned violence (including Interviewee 8, Channel mentor; Interviewee 10, Channel mentor). Yet this programme is supposedly related to non-criminality, with criminal cases being passed up to the Pursue arm of CONTEST. Similarly, in an official Prevent Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) training session, the trainer (also Interviewee 5, Prevent Coordinator) mentioned that "It's fine for

people to have their views but when it crosses to criminality that's when we step in." Moments like these - which were consistent across interviews - divulge the seeming blurriness practitioners experience between criminal and non-criminal subjectivities. Similarly, one mentor suggested that only "possibly one" individual he had intervened with was likely to pose some risk, yet he later stated that "many of my cases I've been able to clearly say 'look I believe the person *no longer poses a threat*, he's been successfully de-radicalised' [author's emphasis]." Apparent internal discrepancies like these were a relatively common occurrence. These confusions and the blurriness are an understandable but concerning consequence of the discursive constitution of 'risk-infused identities'.

Fascinatingly, one official appeared physically uncomfortable at - and contested - the suggestion that 'signs of radicalisation' *should even be considered hazardous*. The extract from his interview sits in awkward juxtaposition with how another practitioner (Interviewee 13, Channel mentor) saw his role: as a "violence prevention practitioner". The extract is a revealing insight into how definitions become confused when they are submerged in opacity because of their relationship with unknown futures. Asked *What do you see as the most hazardous vulnerabilities and signs of radicalisation?*, he replied:

In terms of the most *hazardous*, I don't think we would ever look at what was most *hazardous*. Because we're always very keen to say everyone's different, we're individuals, path of radicalisation and vulnerabilities is uniquely different, and it's really I think potentially misleading if you talk about the most *hazardous* signs. (Interviewee 17, national Prevent lead)

Somehow, the same interviewee later remarked in a comment that "the logical end result of that radicalisation is that you're wanting to stop them from committing an act based on that radicalisation." This utterance demonstrates how 'hazard' could surely be an appropriate conceptualisation if 'acts' (presumably of terrorism) are being considered as "the logical end-

result”. Yet contradictions like these were not uncommon, and are the outcome of working through ambiguity, which itself is a state that results from a requirement of preemptive counter-terrorism to arbitrarily fix identities based on future possibilities.

Van de Weert and Eijkman’s study of youth workers in detecting ‘radicalisation’ indicated that ambiguous aims and conceptual definitions follow the programme through into the implementation stage (2018; also see Dresser 2019). Humans’ varied exposure to “a mix of facts, [and their own] norms, values and personal feelings” contribute to different interpretations of people’s behaviour, which in turn lead to how supposed mal-intent and ‘risk’ are imagined (van de Weert and Eijkman 2018, 17). The role of personal intuition in imagining risk was occasionally narrated in interviews as a necessary and even advantageous component of Prevent: two officials mentioned their ‘gut feeling’ as a useful tool in conceiving where risk might be located (Interviewee 9, former Prevent Police; Interviewee 6, Prevent Coordinator). But where it wasn’t discussed as a beneficial attribute, subjective interpretation - otherwise bias and value-laden preconceptions - was described as necessary and natural, and importantly as unproblematic. One mentor spoke of how “[measurement of a Channel case’s progression] depends on our individual capability or judgement, subjective or otherwise. There’s nothing hard and fast” (Interviewee 10, Channel mentor). Strategic actors talked of the judgement public servants must deploy in imagining security risks, something considered fundamental to the programme’s success. One official, a national lead on Prevent, remarked,

I think it comes down again to that professional judgement of the professionals who know the individual - if they notice something that doesn’t sit right with them, then that’s the thing to notice and to talk to your colleagues about and check. (Interviewee 16)

However, another Prevent national lead (Interviewee 17) reflected that fixing identities through risk-imagining was difficult because of the centrality of the unknown:

But again that's one of the most problematic areas of Prevent delivery. Because you're talking about aspects in someone's behaviour that quite plausibly that could be completely benign, absolutely. It's really really hard, I've found that one of the most challenging aspects.

Banality has been central to the rollout of Prevent (Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2018). Benign behaviours have been established in this policy area as signs of dangerousness in order to ensure those who might actually engage in future violence have a greater chance of being engulfed in the net, leading to these epistemological dilemmas faced by practitioners (Elshimi 2017, 54-58).

The social production of risk was consistently referred to, again as unproblematic and even desirable. One former official (Interviewee 9, former Prevent Police) mentioned that the “best thing about Prevent is there's not just one practitioner, so I could go to [another practitioner] and say ‘what's your feelings on this?’ and come to a conclusion.” Another (Interviewee 6, Prevent Coordinator) remarked, “I don't think [the Channel panel] would agree to somebody exiting the process if they didn't feel certain that that person was no longer at risk of any harm or there's no longer any threat.” Those determining these future security risks are largely safeguarding leads, producing knowledge around where risk may or may not exist, which then feeds back into itself further down the line and self-justifies the logic - including the national discourse on the Prevent programme, which then generates more knowledge as ‘truth’ (Elshimi 2017, 100-125). As Merlingen (2011, 155) writes, “Expertise grounds governmentalities”: governance is constructed by these ‘safeguarding experts’ performing

counter-terrorism duties, and with the logic of Prevent working only in the speculative realm, it becomes clear that the entire project serves merely to fulfil itself.

One practitioner commented on the lack of standardisation across the country:

I imagine the judgment as to where things fall into that category versus what's dealt with locally probably varies across cultures and sectors, how experienced they feel dealing with vulnerable people, and down again to judgement of individuals.  
(Interviewee 16, national Prevent lead)

Assertions like these were not uncommon; the lack of objectivity present in Prevent training administered to institutions around the country was even accepted:

To be honest their hearts [are] in the right place [but] because it's such a contentious area... it's very difficult for some people not to bring their own prejudices or views into it. (Interviewee 6, Prevent Coordinator)

The ambiguous and subjective working conditions of Prevent - and any preemptive security regime - leads to subjective interventions along individual or publicly-held biases, which at best do not dismantle historic conceptions of the 'Other', and at worst compound binary distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. Preemptive counter-terrorism is founded ultimately on a culture of violence thesis (Sellin 1938; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967) and 'new barbarism' thesis (Tuastad 2003), both of which claim that risk exists within certain groups and communities - often along racial lines and without considering wider contexts or environments (Springer 2015; Sian 2017). Moreover, the solution posed to combat violence is often engagement with these groups as specific and separate entities, as Hillyard (1993) and Pantazis and Pemberton (2009) explore with regard to constructed 'suspect communities'. Despite suggesting 'them and us thinking' is a sign of radicalisation, the 'Other' is central to work in



Prevent; distinguishing ‘probably good’ (us) from ‘possibly bad’ (them) is its very purpose. One mentor (Interviewee 8), who occasionally criticised the Prevent apparatus but who saw it as a least bad option, explicitly took the culture of violence idea to task:

Muslim millennials have a particular set of problems, which is [that] their lived experience of their identity - religious and cultural - is one that is inextricably tied in with images of violence and concerns about extremism and terrorism. If you play a word association game, what's the first word you hear with the word Muslim?

Earlier iterations of Prevent that emphasised community-cohesion work assumed the culture of violence logic explicitly (Thomas 2014), but with the inception of Channel pilots in 2007 and its national rollout in 2012, outwardly at least the culture of violence theory is becoming individualised. This is not a wholesale or unqualified claim, by any means: one Prevent Coordinator (Interviewee 6) discussed structural similarities between the conflict in Northern Ireland and mainland Britain today,

There're maybe some good connections that can be made because again if you take away the ideology, there's not too many middle-class Catholics from Malone Road who joined the IRA if you know what I mean.

Regardless of whether risk is understood to sit within communities, or within individuals emanating *from* certain communities, the idea behind the ‘culture of violence’ argument - that broader political factors are less important than the internal problems of those demonstrating ‘risk’ - is still immanent. The critical mentor may be able to sit within Prevent *and* harbour despair about the consequences of the culture of violence perspective for the following reason: structures of preemptive counter-terrorism are being so depoliticised and individualised that

the culture of violence epistemology driving programmes like Prevent is hidden from their own actors.

The rationale of Othering is so powerful that one mentor (Interviewee 10) stressed that the ‘signs of radicalisation’ have been “devised scientifically, it is not some people say applicable to *normal citizens and people* (emphasis added)”. This claim, that there is some identifiable distinction between ‘normal citizen’ and Channel cases, came despite a previous admission that many individuals receiving Channel support have never talked or apparently thought about violence. If the distinction was so objective, ‘normal citizens’ would not be caught up in the process: yet only around 5% of people referred to Prevent are ultimately offered a Channel intervention (HM Government 2017, 2018) - let alone the uncounted number of attempted referrals not accepted by the local receiving officer (Interviewee 15, national Prevent lead). In a significant update of Prevent’s remit, the 2011 Prevent Strategy deemed so-called ‘non-violent extremism’ a matter of concern to Prevent, which broadens and makes more banal the separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This expansion of the net was abundantly clear during WRAP training: one slide read that “religious extremism [is] groups [that] operate outside of normal religious practices.” This biopolitical urge to examine all life “to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die” (Foucault 2004, 241) different aspects of life creates a two-tier system. Behaviours and thoughts imagined to be unproductive are discouraged, and behaviours and thoughts imagined to be productive are encouraged. Given that under this model what constitutes productivity is imagined and determined by the rest of society, minority suspect communities emerge which are comprised of the supposed ‘unproductive’ echelon of society (Hillyard 1993).

For many scholars (Kundnani 2009; Mythen et al. 2009; Heath-Kelly 2012b; Awan, 2012, 2013), various practitioners (including Interviewee 8, Channel mentor; Interviewee 13, Channel mentor), and the experience of many individuals subject to Prevent referrals and

interventions (Prevent Watch 2018), these distinctions are often drawn along racialised lines. One mentor (Interviewee 13) mentioned that “we are being disproportionate in how we’re treating Muslims. This again fuels the negative anti-Prevent that is a toxic agenda environment.” The mentor then ranted passionately for two minutes against discrimination in the justice system between Muslims and everybody else, remarking that it happens precisely “cos they say [contraventions by Muslims are] in opposition to the state, in pursuance of political ideology” where non-Muslim contraventions are seen less in opposition to the state. WRAP training with Interviewee 5 corroborated this: it continually referred to ‘Islamist-inspired extremism’ or ‘international terrorism’ and with wider political implications, whereas ‘right-wing’ crimes were repeatedly discussed as hate crimes, operating on an individual level. The establishment of British values as the antithesis - and antidote - to ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’ (HM Government 2011, 27), encourages “disassociations from ‘Britishness’” to be seen through the lens of security (Martin 2014). Individuals demonstrating such divergence are acted on in order to “put them on a safer path” (Interviewee 6, Prevent Coordinator) and to reconstitute their subjectivities as within the mainstream. Central to the notion of British values is the inside/outside position it forces citizens to take. Indeed, in one interview used for this piece, a Regional Prevent Coordinator (Interviewee 7) leant in, lowered his voice, and ominously pronounced about the ‘anti-Prevent lobby’ that “they have an ideological purpose to get rid of counter-terrorism, just dwell on that, there’s a reason behind it!” At that moment, it was vividly clear what was being communicated. Similarly, Home Secretary Sajid David said in 2018 (quoted in Hymas 2018) that some critics are “actually on the side of extremists.” These inside/outside identifiers - in this case how far British values *and even counter-terrorism itself* are supported - function to demonstrate one’s capacity to engage in productive life or pose some supposed threat.

Rather than being some correctable process, technologies that function through subjective human interaction to separate ‘good’ from ‘bad’, ‘beneficial’ from ‘unproductive’ or ‘more-risky’ from ‘less-risky’, will necessarily ensure the distinctions are imbued with bias and preconceptions. This element of modern preemptive counter-terrorism strategies has created “troubling dichotomies between moderate and radical Islam, or ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims” (Jarvis 2017, 3) that then feed back into the system, leading to several interviewees complaining about racism within the very structure they administer.

### **Concerned concern, safeguarding and the unknown**

Prevention and preemption in counter-terrorism, being necessarily associated with stopping undesirable and destructive futures from occurring, requires the observation (and illumination) of certain behaviours or populations through the lens of security. At a structural level - in national discourse, for example - suspicion is seen as the vehicle through which greater security is achieved (Heath-Kelly 2012a). But at the level of implementation, overt suspicion is much less obvious, and in many cases hardly apparent at all. This section looks at how possibly divergent individuals and behaviour are viewed through the eyes of diluted suspicion or ‘concerned concern’, how safeguarding has become associated with counter-terrorism, and the centrality of the unknown. At this point it is crucial to note that ‘risk’ in broader safeguarding largely relates to protecting subjects - often children - from external risk, but in the context of this discussion on Prevent, ‘risk’ relates to protecting society from the subjects’ own supposed threat because of the dual-function of supporting the individual and protecting society against them. Whilst gang-related safeguarding also demonstrates this dual utility, this form of safeguarding differs by suggesting risk factors are habitual physical behaviours like “persistent offending” (HM Government 2010, 19) rather than Prevent’s fixation upon an individual’s *possible beliefs*. Moreover, gang-related safeguarding places a significant emphasis on an

subject's physical environment, such as "high unemployment [and] sustained poverty" (HM Government 2010: 19), rather than the Prevent model which emphasises the interpretation of an individual's possible cognitive experience of reality, considering them outside a structural environment (see the ERG factors in NOMS 2014; also publicly in CAGE 2016).

Across all of the author's interviews, there was only one instance where any reference to the word 'suspect' was deployed, and even then it was in the context of Prevent critics: "Their observations [say] it securitises Muslims, to create an air of suspicion" (Interviewee 10, Channel mentor). Unlike in national discourse, where the term "suspicion" is routinely mobilised to enact some behavioural change in the population (many councils, safeguarding boards, and local police forces across the country are running a campaign with the tagline, "If you suspect it, report it"), practitioners relied upon "concern" to narrate their roles. A Channel mentor (Interviewee 8) remarked that "Channel, fundamentally, is in the pre-crime space. So we're not talking about people who have broken the law yet, but there are concerns." Similarly, a Prevent Coordinator (Interviewee 6) said that "the majority [of referrals] are based around concerning behaviours and actions." One Channel mentor (Interviewee 13) did not even discuss suspicion despite analogising pre-crime with post-crime cases - where the post-crime cases retrospectively deserve some level of suspicion. Overwhelmingly, the sentiment from practitioners was not of *outright* suspicion of Channel cases they encountered, but of concern *both for and against the individual*. They wanted to make sure the individual was receiving support, yet practitioners also viewed them as negatively divergent. This dichotomy was neatly represented by a Regional Prevent Coordinator (Interviewee 7):

Support comes in many forms, it isn't necessarily 'you're a victim let's put an arm around you' sometimes it's 'well you're problematic but let's support you to move to a safer place for you and others around you.'

This can be captured by the phrase ‘concerned concern’: the adjective preceding the noun demonstrates how the concern itself can be perturbing, associating it at some level with a more overt cognitive suspicion, even if practitioners do not narrate any apparent suspicion that these individuals have intent to commit a crime, let alone an act of violence. Because the duties of Prevent practitioners are so diffusely spread - even amongst the relatively few (60-70) Channel mentors who undertake the 300-400 ‘most concerning’ interventions per year - a theme that practitioners often referenced was of a lack of demonstrable risk in their subjects. This is a result of the fact that Prevent operates so far back temporally from any discernible intent to commit violence to the point where mentors will often not bring up the idea of violence into intervention sessions because they do not want to introduce the concept to their Channel cases (Interviewee 8; Interviewee 10). One Prevent Coordinator (Interviewee 6) summed up the lack of apparent risk, and how concern can operate as a supportive mechanism in relation to a concerning potential future:

If I say ‘I dealt with 30 individuals’ I highly doubt that there’s 30 would-be terrorists there who would’ve gone on to do something... But at the very least I can say that there woulda been 30 individuals and their life wasn’t going exactly as they’d planned, and they were having issues with something or other, and they had the potential to become violent, and we’ve put in place measures to at the very least make their circumstances in life a wee bit better.

So whilst they drive the regime’s epistemology, worst case logics do not obviously transpose into practitioner experience. Such ideas *were* more present in strategic actors’ accounts and in WRAP training. One senior official (Interviewee 7, Regional Prevent Coordinator) mentioned that “We’re not gonna stop every terrorist attack, we’re not gonna be able to disengage everybody, but we want to try.” Similarly, WRAP training stressed: “Don’t assume anything, watch carefully... Radicalisation doesn’t happen overnight, but stopping the warning signs can

protect your family... Learn about the signs before it's too late!" But despite these accounts that echoed the broader discourse around Prevent, the vast majority of individual practitioners saw their role overwhelmingly as providing a supportive service to vulnerable people against the backdrop of concerned concern.

The 'concerned concern' paradox indicates the dual-constitutions of citizens that takes suspicion as implicit. The fusion of logics of care with security-based risk-management considerations is explored to some extent by O'Loughlin (2018), in the context of supposed risk posed by some individuals in prison and psychiatric wards being considered for release (also see: Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2018). This dual role mentioned by practitioners (is Channel *supporting* them, or protecting society *from* them?), is illustrative of the constitution of citizens as possible allies *and* possible threats. Heath-Kelly talks of the autoimmune response triggered by the detection of risk coming from within - bolstered by the discourse around the 'homegrown nature' of the threat (Heath-Kelly 2017; also see Mythen et al. 2009). Citizens under this epistemology are taught to be ever-vigilant, looking to spot where possible trouble exists in their own environment. Anyone travelling on public transport in Britain is regularly reminded to be security-conscious through the "See it, say it, sorted" campaign. Over-reporting is commended (WRAP training emphasises "it might not be anything... but it could be something") to *encourage the viewing of those around us* as possible locations of risk. One mentor gave an example of what this rationale leads to:

In other places you're right, we have people who just see someone praying who wasn't praying before, and get all risk-averse and hysterical, and so they've conflated religious observance and conservatism, with violent extremism. (Interviewee 13)

Identity-fixing, as explored, is not a neutral or valueless phenomenon; it is steeped in bias and personal judgments. Being undergirded with suspicion, concerned concern in counter-terrorism

is the combination of these subjective perceptions, based on an unknown future, and even on fantasy (Jackson 2012). The prominence of what is essentially diluted suspicion with some supportive motivation, though, is a necessary feature of preemptive counter-terrorism implementation that requires people or behaviours to be spotted before their supposed risk materialises.

In line with the paradox underpinning concerned concern, the contested term ‘safeguarding’ for counter-terrorism duties has emerged (Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2018). This word typifies the dilemma that those implementing a preemptive programme face, and the necessary role of some (latent) suspicion - even if a secondary motivation. One mentor (Interviewee 1) illuminated: “[My job is] safeguarding that person from harm, *and safeguarding them from further risk of putting themselves in jeopardy* [author’s emphasis].” Where other forms of safeguarding are designed to support an individual from suffering further harm that has been established, under a preemptive counter-terrorism regime this is only partially the case, with officials taking on the role of *protecting society from them*. In contrast with the only other model that seeks to protect society as well - gang-related safeguarding - referrals (and by extension suspicion) should be based on demonstrable physical behaviour including actual criminality and aggression (HM Government 2010, 19). Yet Prevent directs suspicion towards more indirect - and almost exclusively psychological - signs that may or may not point towards possible future mal-intent (NOMS 2014). Yet because of the banal and diffuse level at which practitioners operate, it has been possible for their duties to be mapped onto safeguarding structures already in place and any contradictions sidelined. As the ‘safeguarding logic’ has taken hold, teachers (and many other public servants) in an “overwhelming majority” accept it as another element of their existing safeguarding duties (Busher et al. 2017, 6). Safeguarding takes a central role in the Channel Duty Guidance, which stresses that Channel-related officials have a responsibility to “ensure that children, young



people and adults are protected from harm” (HM Government 2015a, 4). Prevent was explained in various ways during interviews as “just a common-sense safeguarding duty... it’s quite boring in many respects” (Interviewee 6, Prevent Coordinator), although this interviewee later accepted it sits in a “funny space” because of its counter-terrorism remit. This multiple constitution was discussed more openly by one practitioner (Interviewee 5, Prevent Coordinator):

Safeguarding is where we talk about it sitting, to be sensitive around the topic and the subject, and to get people engaged [and it] tends to pull people in... Safeguarding is the softer title for it I think that engages people, well, communities, more.

Regardless of its intended purpose, how differently practitioners see its role, or how it operates with another (often-unspoken) component in contrast to other forms of safeguarding, it is incumbent to ask: what are the consequences of Prevent’s association with safeguarding, what does this association allow? Considering Prevent as a safeguarding technology has three very apparent results: firstly, it discourages critical reflection of its purpose (as other forms of safeguarding are hardly controversial), secondly it banalises the threshold around what constitutes risk, and thirdly, it rescinds the agency of those who rightly or wrongly would oppose capitalism, British values and everything else Prevent seeks to protect. All three consequences are able to be identified in the interview extracts about safeguarding provided above, to some extent.

Because the dual role of *concerned concern* underpinning Prevent - and any preemptive counter-terrorism project - includes some focus on individuals’ perceived possible divergence, Prevent functions in part through a “plethora of mediated future imaginaries” (Martin 2014) based on the unknown (Jackson 2015). Practitioners consistently referred to the idea of never knowing what risk was posed, never being able to gauge success. One Channel mentor

(Interviewee 10) remarked that determining risk “can never be done 100% and you can never be totally confident.” Because the logic of preemption works through a lack of knowledge, a state of cognitive insecurity is unavoidable. As Ewald (2008: 76) writes, “Preemptive security trumps justice, and insecurity proves itself.” As an inherently neoliberal apparatus with a rationale of governing society that looks at everything as a potential future security risk to be managed (Omand 2010, 11; also see Walker 2009), Prevent will only seek to pin down all possible security-outcomes regardless of their likelihood. It will consider missed opportunities as only having required more information, which, in this realm of guessing somebody’s future mal-intent, equates to greater suspicion. As its logic spreads abroad (Thornton and Bouhana 2017), the consequences of such an approach is important to consider.

### **‘Fixing’ the ‘deficits’**

So where does this preemptive logic - with its varied identity-fixing and suspicion-laden concern - lead? In the context of normativity, how are these undesirable traits overcome? This final section reiterates how the two characteristics of subjective positioning of Others, and suspicion, are *fundamentally necessary* for a counter-radicalisation regime, by looking at some of the main areas through which actors have thought to de-securitise and de-stigmatisate preemptive counter-terrorism.

Many practitioners mused about having to implement a policy based on a lack of information, yet the prominence and necessity of the unknown were not considered a chronic impairment; many merely complained that critics never provided alternative solutions to govern this unknown - and unknowable - space. Rather, they pointed to more training and awareness as solutions. Indeed, along these lines, the name of official Prevent training *Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent*, indicates (as well as the internality of the regime) the priority of improving knowledge around and cognisance of counter-terrorism

responsibilities. Examples of abject failure were occasionally rejected for being not the fault of Prevent but of “ignorant” people calling in for being “worried about any range of things” (Interviewee 8, Channel mentor). The same mentor also spoke of their frustration that beheading videos from Syria had been referred so frequently, remarking “that’s really important to have that clarity [that such videos were *not* ‘signs of radicalisation’], but unfortunately it’s not been consistent across the country.” Yet, because every individual’s trajectory into violence differs - a point vociferously emphasised by practitioners - and the venture of counter-radicalisation is concerned with unknown futures, “there are... no clear signs of terror to be identified” (Jackson 2015, 39) and more information will not help identify individuals’ future possible intent.

Despite this, to a varying degree, almost all interviewees suggested that more research to understand individual psychology, more joined-up thinking by different organisations, and more learning by citizens of what constitutes risk, will lead to fewer “false positives” (Heath-Kelly 2012a). If this happens, went the logic, misunderstandings will be overcome and ‘inappropriate’ referrals minimised. Whilst accepting that there were inconsistencies within Prevent - and talking of his desire to improve it from within - one mentor (Interviewee 13) stressed:

People say ‘oh disproportionate focus on Islam, not the far-right’ and I’ve gone into areas that it’s 50/50. Or if anything it’s 70% of hate crime is far-right. There you go! Or people say ‘inappropriate referrals’ and those organisations have been told ‘don’t do it again’ and they haven’t. You know, better training, organisations have had five-day programmes or more in-depth training to understand that it shouldn’t be based on assumptions or stereotypes. So everywhere there’s been concerns these concerns have been addressed.

Whilst this may sound persuasive - after all, enhanced training on any duty probably means better execution of the process - the programme's very foundations work through people spotting risk as an intuitive function, *which is based on internally-justified and subjective understanding of what constitutes risk in the first instance*. Value-based judgments on whether others' behaviour has the potential to lead to criminality will remain central, regardless of how diffusely the responsibility is spread and how informed people are about what possible 'signs' to look out for. Even where humans are stepping out of the process and algorithms being developed to supposedly spot the signs (Gill 2015, 110), any automated process will only ever produce a façade of objectivity; it will always be infused with human interaction. What constitutes risk will always have prejudice attached because 'risk' is intimately related with the unknown and the Other. Wilcox (2017) writes that regardless of the method (including where algorithms are involved) human prejudice is consistent and integral to all decision-making. This is particularly obvious in Prevent when public servants - and the wider population - are pressed to report based on their intuition, and gut feeling is prioritised as a useful tool of observation and identification.

One solution posited as a remedy to the lack of knowledge, and of counter-radicalisation/extremism as pejorative mechanisms, is their more expansive and 'everyday' rollout. Some mentors argued for counter-radicalisation activities to be embedded entirely within safeguarding (including Interviewee 1, Channel mentor; Interviewee 11, Channel mentor). Indeed, one (Interviewee 1) noted his objection to Prevent being developed under counter-terrorism legislation, and pronounced that the programme should have been developed under safeguarding, victimisation and grooming legislation instead. This mentor commented that it is *unhelpful to think of Prevent in security terms*, and it distorts the reality that Prevent should be considered purely as safeguarding. Despite this, in what appears to be a significant case of cognitive dissonance, the mentor was so impassioned about the security function of

Channel interventions that during the interview, when asked if he thought Prevent had an expiry date, he suddenly leant forward into the recording device between us, and half-bellowed:

*No! No, I don't think there will be, I don't think that. Safeguarding against violent extremism in various different forms is safeguarding against extremely violent behaviour, having a project that safeguards against people in that area is essential.*

More strategic actors spoke of the need for Prevent to remain attached to a counter-terrorism agenda, and therefore as explicitly and inextricably tied to the future:

*But can it become just safeguarding and nothing else? I think we would miss a trick... We still need a strategy that has a budget that reduces that risk. So it's not safeguarding with counter-terrorism, it's a counter-terrorism strategy that has evolved to become more in line with safeguarding [emphasis added]. (Interviewee 7, Regional Prevent Coordinator)*

Without retaining a risk- (and therefore future-) based focus, the strategy *could* become a counter-racism policy or a project to combat 'them-and-us' thinking, because as one mentor (Interviewee 8) mentioned, "Racism in itself still deserves [through Prevent] to be tackled." But such a programme would have to negate its future-facing mandate in order to be detached from counter-terrorism, as the Regional Prevent Coordinator above pointed out.

Several practitioners talked of the need to engrain Prevent-conscious (or concerned concern) thinking in communities and private life in order to detoxify the policy, ultimately as a method to convey identity-fixing as a neutral and natural process. The de-stigmatisation of identities linked to counter-terrorism was referred to a number of times, and in particular safeguarding has been deployed as a discursive technique by Prevent officials to fulfil this:

You would never use the word Prevent in the local community in [UK city] because they saw it as a police-driven process that was actually discriminative against certain cultures within [UK city]. So we said ‘OK we’ll get rid of the term Prevent and work in the community and talk about “how do we safeguard these people?”’ It’s amazing how people change. (Interviewee 11, Channel mentor)

This account implies there was cognitive (and presumably behavioural) change within the target population as a result of a different narrative around the same security-infused responsibilities (albeit with some protective function if the idea of ‘concerned concern’ is to be followed through). Reframing security policy as a social safeguard discourages actors from questioning the basis of their duties (Dresser 2018), broadening the scope for security to become more firmly embedded in the everyday.

In a similar vein, another practitioner (Interviewee 5, Prevent Coordinator) discussed the extension of Prevent into citizens’ private lives:

You might be sitting [in WRAP training representing a private organisation] thinking ‘what’s the point of this for me? I don’t wanna be here.’ Actually whether or not this is relevant to your job role, this is relevant because you live in a [UK county] community.

Because humans exist socially, goes the logic, regardless of context there is a responsibility on everyone to ensure we are assuming some role of concerned concern, in order to bestow some new imagined identity on unsuspecting others - yet these identities are being constructed as not necessarily pejorative, and as essential. At time of writing this challenge has just been extended to children who, according to a senior police officer, are being encouraged to spot risk in others and help reconstitute the identities of their peers as security-concerned (Blunden 2018). Along these lines, Operation Dovetail is being rolled out, in a move explicitly “aiming to de-securitise the process by transferring responsibilities for some elements of Channel from the police to

local government” (Local Government Association 2018). The securitisation of certain constructed ‘suspect communities’ - largely Muslims and those perceived as Muslims - has been a constant criticism of Prevent, recognised as the case by several practitioners. ‘De-securitising’ the preemptive counter-terrorism space by moving a policy away from a criminal behaviour-related institution (the police) and into a generalist institution (the local authority) shows how important detoxifying Prevent has become. Yet, wherever any risk-based focus remains, no matter how banal or diffuse, intuitive suspicion will remain - necessarily to instil subjectivities related to terrorism in order to govern them. Van de Weert and Eijkman (2018, 18) write that, for those who are given counter-radicalisation responsibilities, in order to fulfil their perceived duties they “go the proverbial ‘extra mile’” in providing others with reconstituted and security-infused identities, with the result that oft-identified groups feel stigmatised. So, no matter how banal counter-terrorism becomes, even if it can now be talked about in relation to fox-hunting and motorway-building opposition (Interviewee 5, Prevent Coordinator), this suspicion-laden function will remain if supposed future risk is to be managed.

The entire preemptive project is epitomised in how practitioners considered the evaluation of their work, which will now be briefly explored. Interviewee 16, a national Prevent lead, answering how their role and Prevent help to minimise ‘terrorism’ risk, replied, “It’s like measuring success of a preventative agenda. I think - I mean - *hopefully* we do!” This candid account in another context would be disconcerting: if doctors consistently said to their patients *hopefully that’s what’s wrong, hopefully, this medicine will help* clinics would be in crisis across the country. But this is an honest account of the future-focused element of ‘concerned concern’ without matching it to past demonstrations of persistent behaviour - unlike gang-related safeguarding where the environment and the subject’s violent behaviour is scrutinised.

‘Hopefully’ is the best description they could ever give of their work in bolstering security. A Channel mentor (Interviewee 11) spoke of this quandary of evaluation in more detail:

By default, there is evidence there, but it’s very difficult to prove, using reliable tools... it’s very very difficult to do that. So, therefore, the only way you can do that is [through] part of the psychological intervention.”

The suggestion that evidence that exists ‘by default’ rests on “referential invalidity, the rhetorical circularity” (Zulaika and Douglass 1996, iv) of claims about the ‘signs of radicalisation’ - claims that these signs demonstrate objective risk, and that management of them will reduce the security risk. Moreover, in borrowing (psychological) techniques and evaluation tools only presumed to be related to a security measure, and reconstituting them as “the only way” to demonstrate any evidence of risk-minimisation indicates how far the results of counter-radicalisation are unknown and *unable* to be known.

The dilemma of preemptive work was represented in another discussion about evaluation. Where one practitioner (Interviewee 5, Prevent Coordinator) during WRAP training said with optimism that local “referral numbers are going up and up, and the referrals are getting younger and younger”, a national lead on Prevent (Interviewee 16) was more reflective:

I guess we’re very cautious about reading too much into any figures... What do low numbers mean? Does that mean actually you’ve got really engaged sectors that are safeguarding at a local level doing what they should be doing to look after these individuals, or does that mean that actually, you haven’t got that awareness-raising - it could really be interpreted either way... Are high numbers good or bad, and how do you draw information from that?



## Discussion

Whilst Channel is justified structurally through discourses of “waiting for terror” (Jackson 2015), these apocalyptic narratives are largely absent in its implementation. Practitioners on the ground, believing that minimal risk exists in each individual within the programme, are able to narrate their roles as safeguarding workers. Seeing the banal implementation of a counter-radicalisation policy may have persuaded many that it is only a safeguarding mechanism (Busher et al. 2017), that its logic is far from malign, and that adopting some form of preemptive counter-terrorism can lead to people (especially children) being protected from harm. *Some of this may well be true* - indeed, individuals discussed at Channel panels often receive expedited support from statutory services - but practitioners in a programme that seeks to ‘manage security risks’ must at some level deploy their imaginations about where divergence could lead if an intervention was not provided. This meant that whilst practitioners at the heart of counter-radicalisation in Britain overwhelmingly do not see their role as terrorism prevention or as relating to violence, and cannot be said to be “waiting for terror”, they could not cognitively disassociate from considerations of security risk. As a result, they adopted the duties of fixing identities along the grounds of the arbitrary signs of radicalisation, and viewing citizens through the lens of ‘concerned concern’. Importantly this security-infused concern comes without the physical evidence utilised in gang-related safeguarding (such as violent behaviour and historical criminality), and is instead based on the subject’s presumed opinions and beliefs.

One cornerstone of preemptive counter-terrorism implementation is that individuals (and society at large) are filtered and sorted into categories, in order to be acted upon in line with their new prescribed identities. This subjectification, by all accounts, is not a neutral process but is intimately concerned with identifying the ‘Other’ according to preconceived judgments about what constitutes otherness. Yet this logic sees subjectivity as a desirable

mechanism through which to sort ‘risk’; in the case of Prevent, everyone is able to produce knowledge in the realm of counter-terrorism. Under this circular logic, anybody can report anybody else for demonstrating terrorism-related motives, and safeguarding leads (in the Channel panels) become counter-terrorism experts. Governing possible future intent will always be imbued with valued and biased interpretation. Prevent and other preemptive security structures do not *make possible* the performance of identity distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or ‘more-risky’ and ‘less-risky’, ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’. However, they encourage citizens to distinguish others on binary signifiers (Jarvis 2017) which in turn recreates and reproduces social reality through divisions and separation, rather than unity.

A distinction that has been little emphasised (only by implication in work such as Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2018, and by extension in Lipsky 1980) is how ‘suspicion’ is deployed on significantly different measures from overt national discourse. Where public narratives are overlaid with ominous sentiment that implies some impending doom, practitioners with diffuse responsibilities situate their roles far more as operating through protective mechanisms than as a security apparatus. This article has shown how the preemptive logic functions through ‘concerned concern’, in both a supportive-of and protective-against role. Whilst the *supportive of*, the *non-security infused* element of concern helps practitioners (and government) to frame the work of Prevent around safeguarding, any regime with a risk-based function necessitates the *protective-against* element. Importantly, this is outworked again through prejudice and judgments made using knowledge that could never be complete, because it is making assumptions about others’ possible future trajectories. No matter how banalised the suspicion behind concerned concern becomes, no matter how disparate it appears from national policy through the diffusion of implementation: it must appear in any preemptive ‘risk-managing’ project. The product of detoxified identity-construction in a context of banalised suspicion is a downward spiral: where terrorism is no longer considered a political act, where counter-

terrorism duties are being accepted as one-dimensional protective mechanisms, and where children are being encouraged to perform security-monitoring tasks.

The violence implicit in the reconstitution and re-categorisation of individuals into spaces for state intervention (de Goede 2008) is inherent in ‘counter-radicalisation’ and ‘counter-extremism’ logics. Whilst preemptive programmes may have a cognitively, socially or economically stabilising impact on some individuals, any outcome is necessarily anecdotal because outcomes can only ever be posited against counterfactual alternatives. However banal a regime’s implementation, however far it can be connected with other forms of safeguarding, it will always require firstly the intensely subjective, ill-informed and binary fixing of identities into ‘threatening’ and ‘non-threatening’, and secondly some level of security-centric ‘concerned concern’. Even taking the terms ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ and applying them to state-based violence confers legitimacy upon their consequences (individualisation, decontextualisation, and depoliticisation). So, whilst creative parodies like demonstrating the “radicalisation of Tony Blair in his journey to the War in Iraq” (Baker-Beall 2018) are important to expose the absurdity of preemptive rationales, to accept these terms and the logic they produce as possibly emancipatory would overwrite a history of critical approaches. With the necessary characteristics of preemptive counter-terrorism implementation in mind, rather than follow Prevent’s demand for everyone to just “get with the programme” (Interviewee 3, Channel mentor), in line with its emancipatory agenda CTS should seek constructive and creative ways of challenging hegemonic discourse around risk and othering in our societies.

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## **Interviews and WRAP training**

Interviewee 1, Channel mentor

Interviewee 3, Channel mentor

Interviewee 5, Prevent Coordinator

Interviewee 6, Prevent Coordinator

Interviewee 7, Regional Prevent Coordinator

Interviewee 8, Channel mentor

Interviewee 9, former Prevent Police

Interviewee 10, Channel mentor

Interviewee 11, Channel mentor

Interviewee 12, Professor Sir David Omand, architect of Prevent

Interviewee 13, Channel mentor

Interviewee 15, national Prevent lead

Official WRAP training undertaken January 2018 with Interviewee 5